

# Climate change and capitalism

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Global climate strike in New York City, Sept. 20, 2019. SLL photo: Sharon Black

As ice weighing more than 20 million Empire State Buildings melted from Greenland during the 20th century — and even faster in the last 25 years — the redistribution of mass has [caused the earth to drift off its axis](#).

The near future holds rising sea levels that threaten coastal cities and island nations. Droughts, massive fires and super-storms are featured in the media so often they now seem almost commonplace.

Activists around the world are calling for serious action. Measures that the Biden administration is aiming for are designed to placate the growing anger, but everything proposed by the White House so far falls short of the dramatic changes needed even to limit the worst consequences of global warming.

In big capitalist countries, particularly the U.S., powerful corporations dominate policies no matter who gets elected. Imperialism – an inherent feature of late-stage capitalism – is far and away the biggest cause of climate change and the greatest obstacle to solving it.

U.S. military forces have killed millions of people in direct warfare. The Pentagon is also the biggest polluter on the planet, and brutally enforces underdevelopment the world over, which exacerbates CO2 emissions.

As the U.S. reenters the Paris Climate Agreement and world leaders are setting goals to try to collectively limit the rise in global temperatures, that issue is not even part of the conversation.

## **Reversing Trump not enough**

After an April international summit called for by the White House and a series of executive orders to try to undo the multitude of attacks on environmental policies from the Trump era, the U.S. media are heaping praise on President Joe Biden.

In the days leading up to the summit, Biden called for a series of actions that are by and large defensive measures against the attacks on environmental laws set in motion by Trump, but nothing that resembles the changes that are urgently needed to deal with the crisis.

Climate activists and scientists know that what Biden is calling for so far just isn't enough. Even Biden's U.S. Climate Envoy John Kerry is sounding the alarm over inaction.

There is another huge step that should be done first and foremost – abolish the Pentagon.

The U.S. military is spewing more CO2 and other contaminants into the air than all of the cars and trucks in the United States. In fact, 45 countries pollute less than the U.S. Armed Forces.

As a single entity, measuring the CO2 emissions of U.S. military equipment and the more than 800 bases it operates globally, the Pentagon is the worst polluter in the world. That doesn't even count the emissions of military-industrial corporations that make billions of dollars building this death-dealing equipment.

Emissions by military forces were excluded from participating countries' reports during the 1997 Kyoto Protocol on global warming. A study called "[U.S. Military Pollution](#)", published on TheEcologist.org, used multiple Freedom Of Information Act (FOIA) requests to uncover the role of the Department of Defense in bringing that about: "It's no coincidence that U.S. military emissions tend to be overlooked in climate change studies... In fact, the United States insisted on an exemption for reporting military emissions in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol."

The exemption that allows the U.S. to exclude military emissions was supposed to be done away with in the Paris Climate Agreement, but the decision to either include or

withhold that information is voluntary.

## **Abolish the Pentagon!**

A June 2019 [Brown University study](#) calculates that between 2001 and 2017, all branches of the U.S. military emitted 1.2 billion metric tons of greenhouse gases – more than Denmark and Sweden. That amount included 400 million metric tons from the U.S. wars against Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria, as well as attacks in Pakistan.

In an article on Pentagon pollution posted on [ClimateAndCapitalism.com](#), H. Patricia Hynes describes consumption of fuel by the air force alone: “The U.S. Air Force (USAF) is the single largest consumer of jet fuel in the world.

“Fathom, if you can, the astronomical fuel usage of USAF fighter planes: the F-4 Phantom Fighter burns more than 1,600 gallons of jet fuel per hour and peaks at 14,400 gallons per hour at supersonic speeds. The B-52 Stratocruiser, with eight jet engines, guzzles 500 gallons per minute; ten minutes of flight uses as much fuel as the average driver does in one year of driving!

“A quarter of the world’s jet fuel feeds the USAF fleet of flying killing machines; in 2006, they consumed as much fuel as U.S. planes did during the Second World War (1941-1945) — an astounding 2.6 billion gallons,” Hynes reported.

Since the first U.S. invasion of Iraq in 1990, the majority of U.S. military activity has been to maintain control over oil markets. [According to PressTV](#), U.S. troops are stationed in 14 countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

There is a huge U.S. base in Qatar, the Fifth Fleet is stationed in Bahrain, and there is a U.S. military airport in Oman. We can now add Al-Tanf in Syria, illegally occupied by the U.S. There may also be secret and illegal bases in occupied Palestine.

In the western Pacific, three of the eleven U.S. aircraft carrier groups patrol oil supply routes used by China.

The U.S. military has killed over 500,000 people since the downfall of the USSR, destroyed access to clean water, bombed hospitals and infrastructure, and left behind huge areas so contaminated with depleted uranium as to be uninhabitable. This has all been done to maintain control of oil profits, by the biggest single largest consumer of oil.

The fight to end capitalist exploitation, stop climate change and stop endless imperialist wars are all the same struggle, and it is a race against time. Abolish the Pentagon and save the planet!

